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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE GROUP

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5. The First Secretary of the British Legation in Damascus, C.A.F. Dundas, is said to have made the following statements concerning the above mentioned story:
 - (a) Colonel Sterling had left Hama with a British civil engineer, in order to act as guide during a trip to study irrigation proposals. The two men had gone east from Hama and then north, almost as far as Rusafa. The aim of the trip was purely commercial, and concerned the development of desert land by irrigation.
 - (b) Shortly thereafter, the Hama newspaper al-Duha came out with scare headlines, accusing Sterling of stirring up tribal affairs. Subsequently, Solod saw Sa'dallah al-Jabri, produced a copy of al-Duha, and asked al-Jabri if he had read the article, if the statements made in it were correct, and demanded an explanation. Al-Jabri later saw Colonel Sterling, as reported in paragraph 1, and Sterling told him the story of the irrigation study trip. Al-Jabri told this to Solod, who refused to accept Sterling's explanation.
6. When Dundas was told that Solod had written a letter to the Foreign Office in protest of the incident, he said that he was inclined to doubt it.
7. Dundas said that he thought the trouble had begun earlier, during the events accompanying the arrest of Sulayman Murshid (September 1946) in Latakia. At this time, Dundas pointed out, there was no prohibition against foreigners going to the Alawite province. Solod had mentioned to al-Jabri that he intended to take a trip to Latakia, and al-Jabri had immediately forbidden him to go, in view of the circumstances. Solod was indignant, as a consequence, and was at present looking for opportunities to charge discrimination, according to Dundas. It was this circumstance, Dundas thought, that had led the Syrian government to escape from embarrassment by passing the decree which closed the northern areas to foreigners.

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